

Who is Volunteering for Today's Military?

Myths *versus* Facts

Each year, about 180,000 young Americans enlist for active duty service in the Armed Forces. A number of myths have been perpetuated about those young people who volunteer to serve. The information herein is intended to dispel such myths.

Myth: *Military recruits are less educated and of lower aptitude than American youth.*

Fact: *The opposite is true.* Over 90 percent of military recruits have a high school diploma – a credential held by only about 75 percent of their peers. A traditional high school diploma is the best single predictor of “stick-to-it-iveness” and successful adjustment to the military. Recruits with a high school diploma have a 70-percent probability of completing a three-year term of enlistment, compared with a 50-percent likelihood for non-graduates.

Nearly two-thirds of today’s recruits are drawn from the top-half of America in math and verbal aptitudes – a strong determinant of training success and job performance (Figure 1).

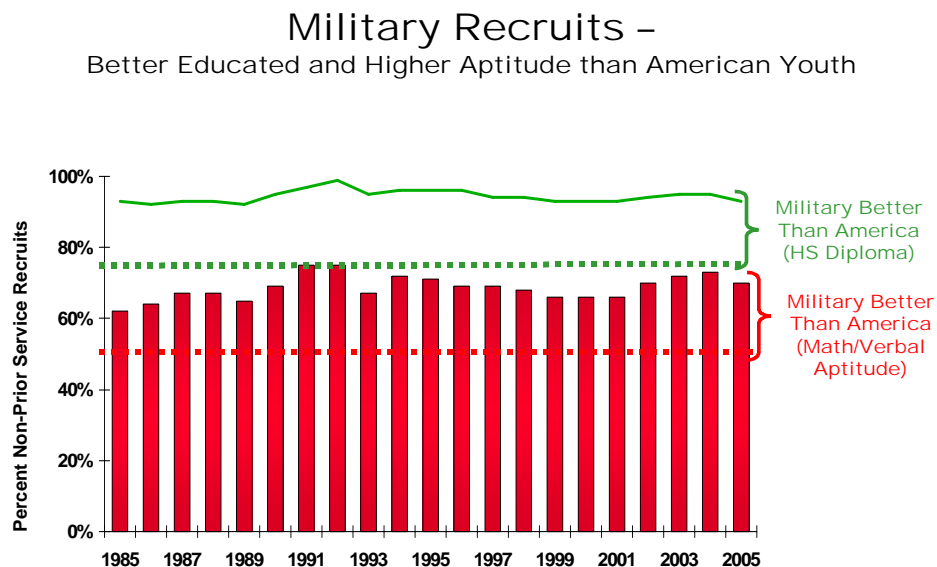


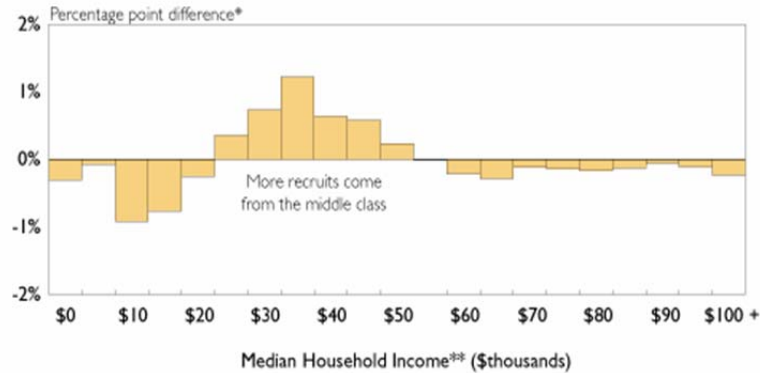
Figure 1

Myth: The Military attracts disproportionately from poor or underprivileged youth.

Fact: Military recruits mirror the US population and are solidly middle class.

A recent report shows that more recruits come from middle income families, with far fewer drawn from poorer families (Figure 2). Youth from upper income families are represented at almost exactly their fair share.

Differences Between Recruit and Civilian Income Distribution

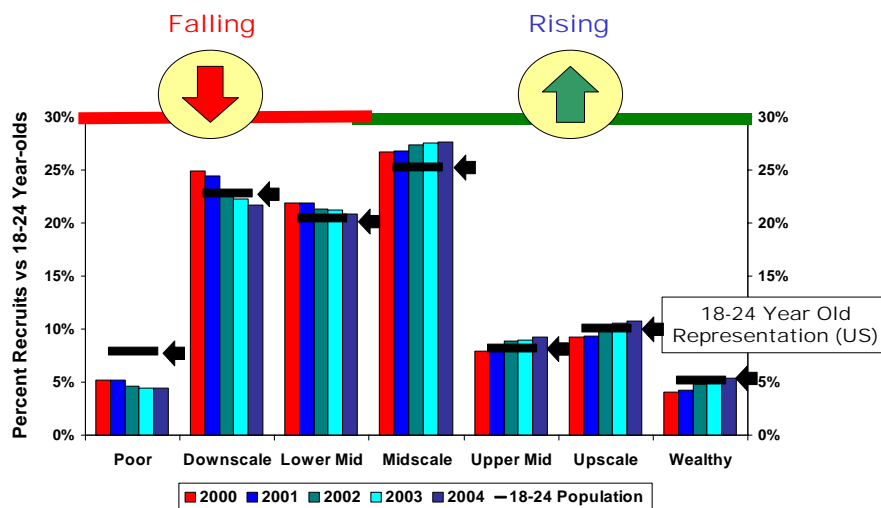


Source: Heritage Foundation; distribution of 1999 recruits minus distribution of 18-24 year old population
Figure 2

Data show that patterns in recent years are simply reinforcing this trend (Figure 3). More recruits are coming from families in the mid-scale and upper socioeconomic strata, while fewer are coming from families with lower earnings.

Recruits by Socio/Economic Status

Compared to 18-24 year old population



Source: Socio/Economic Status data – Claritas® ... Recruit data – Defense Manpower Data Center

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Figure 3

Myth: *A disproportionate number of military recruits come from urban areas.*

Fact: *Urban areas are the most underrepresented.* Data show that urban areas are actually underrepresented among new recruits. Suburban and rural areas are overrepresented.

Myth: *African Americans suffer a disproportionate number of casualties.*

Fact: *The opposite is true.* Continuing the pattern from Desert Storm, African Americans remain under-represented among casualties in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Through November 5, 2005, African Americans represented about 17 percent of the force, yet accounted for 11 percent of deaths. On the other hand, whites accounted for 67 percent of the force, and suffered 74 percent of deaths. The corresponding numbers for Hispanics were 9 and 11 percent.

This pattern results from occupational choices young people make. For example, African American youth choose to serve in support occupations such as the health care field, which tend to feature valuable job training over bonuses or education incentives. These are the choices young volunteers make.

Myth: *The military is not geographically representative of America.*

Fact: *Military recruits are closely proportionate to the general population.*

The southern region of the US generates the most recruits, but also has the greatest density of youth population. The south produces 41% of all recruits (compared to 36% of the 18-24 year old population). The northeast generates 14% of new recruits (18% of the 18-24 year old population). The west and north central regions produce 21 and 24% of new recruits (accounting for 24% and 23%, respectively, of the 18-24 year old population).

Myth: *The military takes no better than an average cut of American youth when it comes to medical or physical conditioning.*

Fact: *About half of today's youth are not medically or physically qualified against current, and necessary, enlistment standards.*

Everyone joining the military is rigorously screened for a variety of medical and physical factors that bear on successful military performance – often under austere conditions. A number of common maladies among today's youth (asthma, orthopedic injuries, and obesity) are disqualifying. DoD sustains these standards to ensure that U.S. forces are able to meet the demands placed upon them by worldwide deployments in physically challenging circumstances. Nearly one half of American youth tend to be disqualified for health-related reasons, with obesity as the leading cause.

Myth: *The Military is a good alternative for youthful offenders.*

Fact: *Current enlistment standards bar many youthful offenders from enlisting.*

Today's military requires individuals with strong moral character. One underlying purpose of moral character screening is to minimize entrance of those who are likely to become disciplinary problems in units, or security risks. Moreover, the Services have a responsibility to parents who expect their sons and daughters will not be placed into close association with persons who have committed serious offenses or whose records show ingrained patterns of misbehavior.

Myth: *Incentives and bonuses are not very effective in stimulating recruiting.*

Fact: *Bonuses and incentives are instrumental to the Services' recruiting efforts.*

Studies consistently show that bonuses and education incentives are cost-effective in offsetting challenges posed by a strong economy or changing enlistment propensity. The most efficient incentive packages – constantly redesigned -- are used by all Services to recruit the right people, at the right time, with the right skills, at the lowest cost.

Incentives are used to expand the market, to channel enlistments into critical skills; to encourage specific "terms of enlistment" ranging from 2 to 6 years; to motivate sooner enlistment when needed to fill training vacancies; and to reward higher education. The bottom line is that incentives, when applied efficiently, are often the difference between failure and success in recruiting America's all-volunteer force.